

Park History Advisory Committee

Draft Statement of Goals and Accomplishments

Barry Mackintosh

This is a report on the purpose, progress, and outcome of the recent NPS History Programs Strategic Planning Meeting held in Baltimore, MD, which will henceforth be known as the Park History Advisory Committee (PHAC).

The Vail Agenda and the Humanities Review Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board have called upon the National Park Service to strengthen its professionalism in historical research and interpretation. To this end they have recommended certain changes within the NPS organization and greater interaction with outside academic institutions, professional organizations, and scholars.

With these recommendations in mind, the NPS History Division hosted a meeting in Baltimore on March 29–31, 1994, to identify constructive ways to improve the bureau's history programs and initiate steps to implement them.

Before the meeting, the participants had been asked to propose issues for discussion. They responded with 25 suggested topics, nearly all of which received attention in 21 group discussions held during the first two days:

- Making NPS historical studies more usable
- Promoting professionalism
- What is an NPS historian?
- Streamlining Section 106 compliance
- The role of the research historian
- Supporting interpretation
- The role of historians in park planning
- More studies with less money
- Servicing our customers/historical societies
- Preserving and interpreting cultural landscapes
- National Historic Landmarks Survey/special resource studies/national significance
- Strengthening ties with academia
- Using new technologies
- Interpreting the big picture
- The role of the History Division
- Historians in the parks
- The new social history
- The bias for historic-fabric-related research
- Improving communications
- The National Register program

The groups concluded their discussions by proposing specific actions to resolve problems and improve programs. Then and in a final plenary session in which each group's findings and recommendations were presented, participants volunteered to take responsibility for initiating or carrying out the various actions. The History Division was targeted with general responsibility for

some of them, and committees were formed to collaborate further on many. At the conclusion of the meeting the chief historian committed the History Division to move immediately on several recommended actions:

- Coordinating preparation of an NPS historians' handbook, to include such topics as alternative ways of accomplishing research projects, serving management better, taking advantage of new technologies, and publishing guidance;
- Preparing a directory of NPS historians, with information on their professional backgrounds and specialties;
- Expanding the list of NPS historians in the *AHA Directory of History Departments and Organizations* to include historians in regional offices, centers, and parks;
- Publishing annually in *CRM* a list of NPS-related historical research projects recently completed or underway;
- Issuing a computerized history newsletter to improve communications among NPS historians;
- Adjusting Cultural Resources Preservation Program criteria to encourage history studies addressing multiple parks or topics where cost-effective;
- Establishing annual awards, funded by NPS cooperating associations, for the best book, journal article, and dissertation on NPS history by outside scholars.

Other recommendations will be adopted following additional input from small task forces and Washington Office review.

The meeting adjourned with a strong sense that the discussions had been focused and productive, that the recommendations were sound, and that the participants were prepared to translate them into positive results. It was a good beginning.

Barry Mackintosh is Bureau Historian for the National Park Service.

The National Maritime Alliance

Kevin J. Foster

The United States is a maritime nation, founded on wealth wrested from and carried upon the water. This maritime heritage is an essential aspect of our country's history. The preservation of these unique resources and their rich legacy have been sorely neglected. Many irreplaceable lighthouses, vessels and other structures are endangered; too many have been lost. What little of this national heritage that exists does so through the heroic efforts of individuals and groups across the country.

Organized maritime preservation was long considered a hodge-podge collection of people working toward diverse, but related, goals. The field was recognized as multiple small constituencies rather than one larger, inclusive constituency. Most people consider the maritime preservation movement to include these subfields: lighthouse and ship preservation; traditional skills education in sailing and boatbuilding; maritime museums; historic canals and waterways; nautical archeology; and